



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Migration, Refugees and Displaced Persons

As delivered by Deputy Assistant Secretary for Population, Refugees
and Migration Kelly Ryan
to the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, Warsaw
October 8, 2004

National and international policies on migration, refugees and internally displaced persons (IDP) affect millions of individuals in the OSCE region. The United States commends the Maastricht Ministerial recognizing the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement as a "useful framework for the work of the OSCE and the endeavors of participating States in dealing with internal displacement." We urge participating States to observe and implement these Principles. The United States also looks forward to the upcoming Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on IDPs. Recommendations emerging from that meeting should be reflected in Sofia.

Unresolved refugee and IDP situations in the Balkans, the Caucasus and elsewhere exacerbate regional tensions while leaving thousands in vulnerable positions. The United States urges those participating States with refugee and IDP populations residing on their territory to work in partnership with international organizations to find durable solutions to the displacement. We applaud positive approaches, such as the Government of Kyrgyzstan's decision to grant citizenship to refugees from Tajikistan. The United States also encourages the international community and the OSCE to stay engaged on these issues.

Regarding Chechens, the United States strongly supports the principles of voluntary return and alternative shelter for those displaced by the ongoing conflict. The displaced population is traumatized by conflict and often lives in extremely difficult conditions. After the reprehensible June attacks in Ingushetia, UNHCR reported that 20 temporary settlements, hosting around 7,800 IDPs, were either under threat of eviction or affected by utility cuts. The closures of the remaining tent camps in Ingushetiya during the past year have heightened concern for the treatment of these IDPs. Until root causes are addressed, displaced Chechens will be unable or unwilling to return. We ask that all IDPs be given full freedom of movement and allowed to freely relocate anywhere within the Russian Federation, including the possibility of remaining in Ingushetiya.

In the Balkans, while refugees continue to return home, poor economic prospects coupled with the ongoing lack of housing and property rights have hampered these efforts. We agree with OSCE Head of Mission, Ambassador Peter Semneby, that the Croatian Government must deliver on its commitments to all returnees. We welcome remarks by Serbian Prime Minister Kostunica upon taking office in March which highlighted Serbia's large population of refugees and IDPs. We trust the Serbian Government will allow IDPs to request and collect their personal documents in their area of residence. A re-registration of IDPs in Serbia and Montenegro, which the U.S. Government supports, may help overcome this obstacle.

Concerning Kosovo, the United States was greatly troubled by the March violence, which has had a negative effect on returns this year. Kosovar authorities must do more to create an environment that facilitates sustainable returns and protection for all communities. This will be a priority standard as Kosovo prepares for the mid-2005 review. In addition, we urge that steps be taken to expedite the closure of property claims cases at the local level.

Recent tensions in Georgia remind us of the importance of protecting IDPs from armed conflict; we urge Georgia to continue to protect innocent persons whose lives or safety are threatened.

Regarding developments in Turkey, we welcome the adoption of a law allowing IDPs to receive compensation for material losses caused by the PKK conflict. At the same time, thousands of IDPs who fled the southeast during the terrorist PKK insurgency still remain unable to return to their villages. Past return programs have proven ineffective, nontransparent and discriminatory; future return programs would benefit if Turkish authorities clarified concerning return, resettlement and reintegration options.

The United States urges any OSCE participating State which has yet to accede to either the Geneva Refugee Convention or its protocol to do so and to uphold refugee protection principals.

The OSCE has played a productive role in responding to IDP situations in the region. The United States would welcome further development and strengthening of the OSCE mandate in these situations. The OSCE, ODIHR and OSCE field missions should increase their engagement with governments when IDP rights, such as the right to vote and freedom of movement within the home country away from the zone of conflict, are restricted. The OSCE should also promote national institutions protecting IDPs and work with governments to improve the legal situation of IDPs and refugees, while raising awareness about the UN Guiding Principles. These steps will promote just, realistic and durable solutions for refugees and internally displaced persons.